



NEWSLETTER

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY

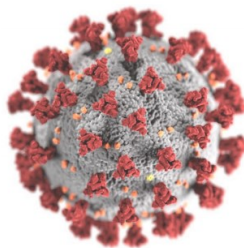


SD HEALTH DEPARTMENT LAUNCHES NEW COVID-19 VACCINATION INFO TOOLS

The South Dakota Department of Health has announced the release of two helpful tools designed to better inform South Dakotans on the ongoing COVID-19 vaccine distribution and administration process. These tools are in addition to the already available [dashboard](#), which is updated daily.

“Working closely with our partners, we are ensuring a smoother experience for the end-user, even as federal vaccine allocations continue fluctuating,” said Kim Malsam-Rysdon, Secretary of Health. “I want to extend my gratitude to Avera Health, Mobridge Hospital, Monument Health, Northern Plains Health Network and Sanford Health, for their dedication and for being crucial partners in the fight against COVID-19 in our state.”

The first tool is a [county-by-county map](#) linking residents to the healthcare system(s) charged in overseeing vaccine distribution and administration in their area, in collaboration with the Department of Health. The second provides residents an [estimated timeline of vaccine availability](#), depending on which priority group (A-E) they belong to in accordance to Phase 1 of South Dakota’s [vaccination plan](#).



COVID-19 Vaccination Plan

SOUTH DAKOTA

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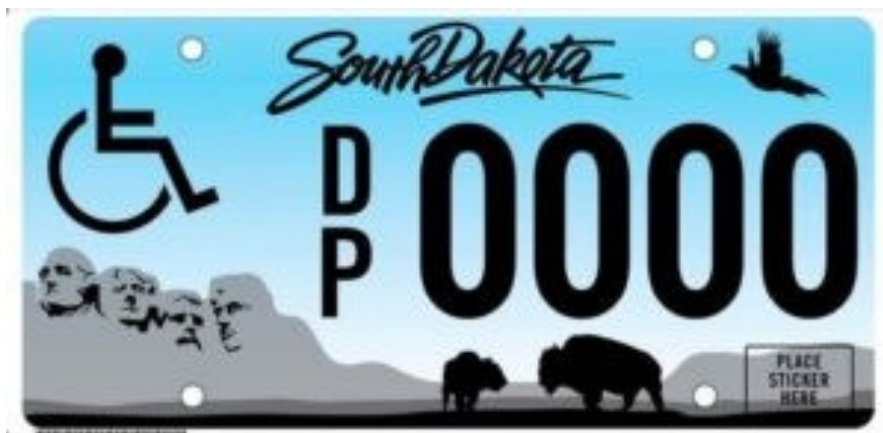
DISABLED VETERANS AND PERSONS WILL SEE NEW LICENSE PLATE DESIGN IN 2021

Disabled veterans and disabled persons will receive newly designed license plates at renewal time, beginning January 1, 2021.

At the time of renewal, there will be a \$5 per plate mailing fee per license plate set to receive the new license plate. A 45-day plate ordered permit will be issued to use until the new license plate set arrives in the mail.

Disabled veteran plate owners will be reverified with the Veterans Administration at the time of renewal. A new disabled veteran plate application will have to be submitted to the veteran's local county treasurer's office.

Applications are located at county treasurer offices and online. Print the Disabled Person Parking Permit and License Plate Application at <https://sddor.seamlessdocs.com/f/1305>. Print the Military License Plate Application at <https://sddor.seamlessdocs.com/f/1303>. For more information, county treasurer contact data can be found at <https://dor.sd.gov/government/county-treasurers/contact-county-treasurers/>.



TRIWEST HEALTHCARE ALLIANCE CORP AGREES TO PAY VA

The Department of Justice announced TriWest Healthcare Alliance Corp. has agreed to pay the United States \$179,700,000 to resolve claims that it received overpayments from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in connection with its administration of certain VA health care programs.

TriWest, an Arizona corporation headquartered in Phoenix, is in the business of administering government health care programs, including those operated by the VA. TriWest is responsible for administering certain portions of the VA Patient-Centered Community Care Program (PC3) and the VA's former Veterans Choice Program (Choice). Both programs have enabled veterans to obtain medical care from providers in their communities. As an administrator of these programs, TriWest is paid by the VA to coordinate medical appointments and make payments to health care providers.

The settlement resolves allegations that TriWest retained overpayments from the VA in connection with its administration of the PC3 and Choice Programs. The alleged overpayments included payments by the VA to TriWest twice for the same services as well as payments for services for which TriWest received full or partial reimbursement from certain health care providers.

"The VA's PC3 and Choice Programs have provided significant benefits to our nation's veterans," said Acting Assistant Attorney General Jeffrey Bossert Clark of the Justice Department's Civil Division. "The department will continue to support the VA and its Office of Inspector General in ensuring that the VA's programs are administered properly and that taxpayer funds are used as intended."

"The VA provides invaluable assistance to those who have sacrificed on our behalf," said U.S. Attorney Michael Bailey for the District of Arizona. "It is vital that those who administer programs for the VA be held accountable to do so with the utmost care and integrity."

"The VA Office of Inspector General works tirelessly to promote the economy, efficiency, and integrity of the VA's programs and operations," said VA Inspector General Michael J. Missal. "This settlement is integral to ensuring that the VA's funds are spent for the benefit of our nation's veterans. I appreciate the teamwork and dedication that led to this significant recovery."

The settlement was the result of a coordinated effort by the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Arizona, the Department of Justice Civil Division's Commercial Litigation Branch, and the VA and its Office of Inspector General. The claims resolved by the settlement agreement are allegations only, and there has been no determination of liability.

VA ADMINISTERS OVER 146,000 COVID-19 VACCINE DOSES TO DATE

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced it has administered initial COVID-19 vaccine doses to more than 14,000 veterans at high risk of getting COVID-19 infection, and more than 132,000 health care employees as of Jan. 4.

In accordance with VA's [COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution Plan](#), the Department started vaccination efforts at 37 initial VA medical centers, following the Food and Drug Administration's Dec. 11 decision to issue an Emergency Use Authorization for the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine.

The 37 initial sites to first receive the vaccine were selected based on several factors, including having the capacity to store the vaccine at extremely cold temperatures and the ability to offer high-quantity vaccination. Shortly after, the VA included 128 additional sites to the original list. To date, the list of sites has grown to 195 VA facilities spread out across the country with more being added.

"This is a massive undertaking that is happening at rapid pace," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "This week, the initial 37 sites that received the first limited Pfizer-BioNTech allocations are beginning to administer the second dose."

The second dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine should be administered 21-days after the first vaccination while the second Moderna dose should be administered 28-days after the first. The VA began administering Moderna the week of Dec. 21, 2020. Both vaccines require two doses for maximum efficacy.

VA's ultimate goal is to offer COVID-19 vaccinations to all veterans and employees who want to be vaccinated. As vaccine supplies increase, VA care teams will reach out to eligible veterans to schedule vaccinations. There is no need to preregister or come to a facility to sign up.

Veterans can get up-to-date information and sign up to receive updates on VA's [COVID Vaccine webpage](#).

VA PUBLISHES FINAL REGULATION TO IMPROVE DELIVERY OF PROSTHETIC AND SENSORY AIDS SERVICES

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) recently published a final rule to establish and clarify eligibility for prosthetic and rehabilitative items and services available to veterans.

This establishes for the first time, the nationwide categories of prosthetic and orthotic services, sensory aids and medical devices the VA is authorized to provide to veterans as part of their active treatment and ongoing rehabilitation.

Previously, these categories varied across VA medical centers.

“The rule establishes a uniform approach for VA to deliver prosthetic items and services to veterans,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “It ensures veterans receive the same standard of service for the rehabilitative devices they need to live independently, no matter which medical center they walk into.”

Categories of prosthetic and rehabilitation items and services defined in the rule include: adaptive household items, adaptive recreation equipment, cognitive devices, communication devices, home exercise equipment, home medical equipment, home respiratory equipment, implants, mobility aids, orthotic devices, prosthetic limbs and replacement items.

The rule reflects VA’s veteran-centered approach to health care, by empowering the veteran and clinician to jointly decide which prosthetic equipment will best meet the veteran’s treatment or rehabilitation needs, based on clinical need and veteran input. While the items the VA currently provides to veterans will not significantly change, the rule enables the VA to identify current best practices to serve as the standard for all veterans who receive their care through the VA.

As the largest and most comprehensive provider of prosthetic devices and sensory aids in the country, the VA provides a full range of equipment and services to veterans, including artificial limbs and bracing, wheeled mobility and seating systems, implants and devices surgically placed in the veteran (e.g., hips and pacemakers), and home respiratory care. In fiscal year 2020, the VA provided approximately 21 million prosthetic devices/items to veterans, serving more than 52% of all veterans treated in VA.

For more information, visit VA’s [Prosthetic and Sensory Aids Services webpage](#).

VA EXPANDS ACCESS TO TELEHEALTH SERVICES DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced its [Digital Divide Consult](#) has helped more than 12,000 veterans obtain internet access or a video-capable device for their health care needs.

As part of the program, VA providers refer veterans to a VA social worker, who determines eligibility for various programs to assist with getting the internet service or technology needed for VA telehealth — ensuring older veterans, those living in rural areas, and veterans who are homeless or in temporary housing have the opportunity to participate.

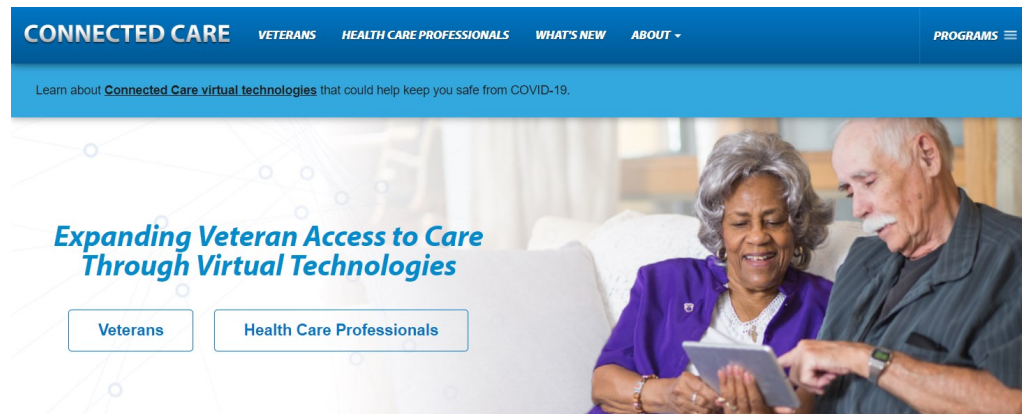
According to the Journal of the American Medical Informatics Association, veterans with lower incomes, more severe disabilities, and more chronic conditions are more likely to use virtual care during the pandemic; but veterans older than 45 and veterans who are homeless or who live in rural areas are less likely to use video care. The Digital Divide Consult provides a solution for these veterans to access video care when needed.

“The pandemic has tested the VA’s workforce like never before, and innovations like the Digital Divide Consult highlight the ingenuity and resilience that have been hallmarks of the Department’s successful response to this national emergency,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “As our virtual care infrastructure continually improves, so does the quality and accessibility of veterans’ care.”

VA’s Digital Divide Consult and other initiatives are prime reasons the use of telehealth services by veterans continues to rise. In mid-November, a total of 196,116 telehealth video visits to veterans in their homes or other off-site locations were completed over a seven-day period, representing a 1,653% increase in weekly VA Video Connect visits since the end of February. The number of video appointments held per day peaked at more than 41,000.

To further enable veterans to participate in telehealth, VA facilities are establishing test-call services to support veterans ahead of their first video visit. Additionally, the VA is partnering with Microsoft’s Airband initiative to educate veterans on essential digital skills. The VA intends to update the Digital Divide Consult as opportunities for future broadband and device discounts become available.

Learn more about VA telehealth at <https://connectedcare.va.gov/>.



Connecting Veterans to Telehealth Care

Many Veterans are turning to telehealth to access care from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. But for Veterans living in rural areas or for those that may have limited broadband connectivity, VA telehealth services can be difficult to access. That's why VA is working to **bridge this digital divide** and ensure that all Veterans can access VA telehealth care.



15%

of Veteran households
do not have an
internet connection.

*Federal Communications
Commission, 2019*



Digital Divide Consult

If you would benefit from video telehealth services but don't have internet access or a video-capable device, the VA's Digital Divide Consult can help. Through the Digital Divide Consult, your VA provider can refer you to a VA social worker who can determine your eligibility for programs to help you get the internet service or technology needed for VA telehealth. For more information about the Digital Divide Consult, talk to your VA provider.



VA Internet-Connected Devices

If you don't have a device with internet access, VA can lend you an internet-connected iPad so you can reach your VA care team through telehealth. The Digital Divide Consult can help determine if you are eligible.

If you participate in the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development – VA Supportive Housing Program, you can receive a smartphone for telehealth care if you don't have a mobile phone.



Free Mobile Connectivity for Telehealth

SafeLink by TracFone, T-Mobile, and Verizon enable Veteran subscribers to use VA Video Connect without data charges while on their networks. This gives you easy access to your VA care team without having to worry about data fees.

Contact your cellular data service provider for more information. To learn more about VA Video Connect, visit mobile.va.gov/app/va-video-connect.



Telehealth Sites in Your Community

Through the Accessing Telehealth through Local Area Stations (ATLAS) program, VA and its partners are offering comfortable, private spaces at select locations for Veterans to have video appointments with VA providers. VA has teamed up with public and private organizations including **The American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Philips, and Walmart** to bring telehealth to locations in communities across the country. To see if there is an ATLAS site near you, visit connectedcare.va.gov/partners/atlas.



Broadband and Digital Skills Programs in Rural Areas

VA is partnering with Microsoft's Airband Initiative to establish or enhance broadband connectivity in select rural areas. The Airband Initiative also offers free digital skills classes to Veterans. To learn more about Microsoft Airband, visit microsoft.com/corporate-responsibility/airband.



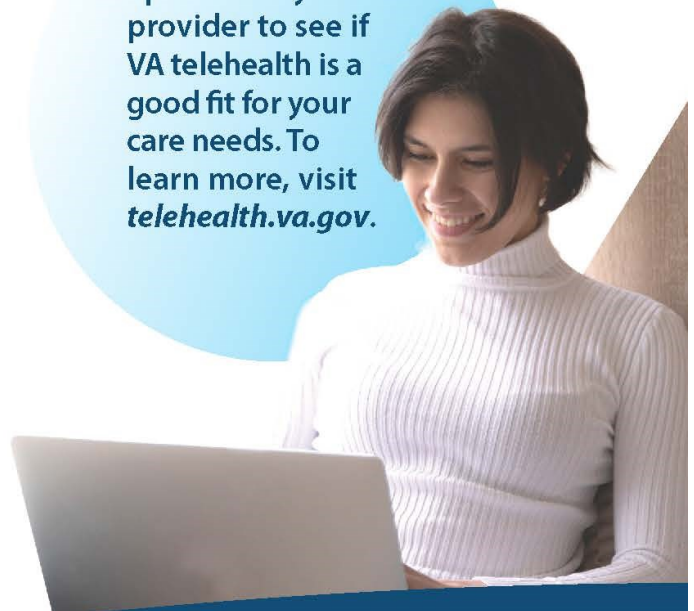
Internet and Phone Service Discounts

The Federal Communications Commission's Lifeline program subsidizes the cost of home broadband and phone service. Many Veterans are eligible for FCC Lifeline benefits, including Veterans with lower incomes and Veterans who participate in the following federal programs:

- Medicaid
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
- Supplemental Security Income
- Federal Public Housing Assistance
- Veterans Pension and Survivors Benefit
- Tribal programs and residents of federally recognized tribal lands

To see if you qualify, call **800-234-9473** between 9 a.m. – 9 p.m. Eastern or visit lifelinesupport.org.

Speak with your VA provider to see if VA telehealth is a good fit for your care needs. To learn more, visit telehealth.va.gov.



VA Telehealth



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration
Office of Connected Care

UPCOMING EVENTS

Jan 12—Governor's State of the State Address—1:00 pm (CT)

Jan 13—SD Veterans Council Meeting—Post 8 American Legion—Pierre—2:00 pm—4:30 pm (CT)

Jan 13—SDDVA/SD Veterans Council Legislative Reception—RedRossa Italian Grille—5:30 pm—7:30 pm (CT)

Feb 19-21—American Legion Mid-Winter Conference—Oacoma

Apr 9-10—DAV State Convention—Rushmore Hotel and Suites—Rapid City

Aug 16-19—SDDVA Annual Benefits School—Ramkota Hotel—Pierre



Update from Dakotas Regional Office

Veterans Benefits Administration Regional Office in Sioux Falls will be reopened its Public Contact unit effective January 4, 2021. Hours of operation are modified slightly. The RO VBA Public Contact will be opened from 8:00 am to 1:30 pm CST daily excluding federal holidays. Vocational Readiness and Employment public interactions will also be offered during these hours of operation.

This modified schedule is not permanent but will be the initial hours of operation for VBA Sioux Falls' reopening.

Please note: Veterans Healthcare Administration Eligibility, ID Card, and Travel offices are opened; however, these services are offered in the main hospital building and are not yet being offered in the Regional Office, Building 38.

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